

## IRAN: FLASHPOINT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BY

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**IRAN: FLASHPOINT IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Tehran continues to subvert America's and its allies' interest in the Middle East by supporting militant groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, aggressively seeks a nuclear arsenal despite international pressure to discontinue these ambitions, and is the chief sponsor of state terrorism by supplying organizations such as Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Strategically, can the United States and international community afford Iran to possess nuclear weapons? If not, what strategic options are available to the international community to curb Tehran's defiant behavior? Given the geopolitical situation what strategic dilemma does U.S. policy face toward Tehran? To frame these strategic questions, the project examines the historical perspective of Iran's emergence as a modern state; providing a universal understanding of Tehran's ideology and present day agenda. A foreign policy analysis focuses on the timeframe from Bush 43 presidency to present day, discussing events which have occurred during this time. In conclusion, an analysis of obstacles facing the United States will be discussed and various strategies are offered to curtail Tehran's aggressive behavior to undermine stability in the Middle East.





## IRAN: FLASHPOINT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In a country like Iran, with a sophisticated and well-capitalized energy sector, it is more than curious that a nuclear program--said to be purely civilian in nature and purely for power generation purposes--seems to have much closer ties to the Iranian military than it does to the rest of the civilian energy sector.

---Kenneth C. Brill,  
U.S. Ambassador to the IAEA<sup>1</sup>

Every American president since the 1979 Islamic revolution has been unsuccessful in dealing with the challenges presented by Iran. Tehran continues to subvert America's and its allies' interests by supporting militant groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, being a chief sponsor of state terrorism by supplying organizations such as Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and aggressively seeks nuclear weapons to upset the balance of power in the Middle East despite international pressures to circumvent these ambitions.

Tehran's current global and regional conduct toward regional supremacy presents a flashpoint worth examining, due to Iran's ability to disrupt the flow of oil through the Straits of Hormuz and Persian Gulf and its impact to the global economy. Tehran has the ability to cause massive regional destabilization in Iraq and Afghanistan, and cause further destabilization by using Hezbollah to initiate conflict with Israel. Hezbollah presents a global terrorist threat on America and allied targets if they agreed to support Tehran's agenda.

Iran's emergence as a modern nation-state has contributed to the development of its current ideology and agenda. Analyzing Iran's historical perspective offers a method for understanding of how the tumultuous relationship between the United States and Tehran has developed overtime, which has ultimately resulted in a distrust and

deep-seeded ideological antagonism between the two nations. The historical perspective formulates a framework of how Tehran views its complex and ever-changing environment. Looking through Tehran's strategic lens by examining Iran's agenda offers a culturally attuned viewpoint to construct a sound U.S. national policy and strategy when dealing with Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Tehran's Middle Eastern and global strategic agenda to counter imposed international sanctions, advance its nuclear weapons program, protect its national security interests, increase its sphere of influence, and ultimately advance its aspirations toward becoming a regional hegemonic power is a threat that must be planned for and countered.

National policy, with regard to Iran, has evolved during both President George W. Bush's and President Barrack H. Obama's administrations and offers invaluable insight into actions taken on this critical issue in world politics. These policies lay a viable foundation to formulate relevant U.S. policy options in the future.

There is a question to consider when reading through this discussion and analyzing the difficult problem to block Iranian proliferation and the consequences presented when pursuing various courses of actions toward a positive resolution. Does Tehran hold the "high political ground" resulting in President Obama being impotent to leverage the dimensional tools of the Political, Military, Economic, Social Information, and Infrastructure (PMESII) model when dealing with the ambiguous environment presented? Taking this into consideration, the paper offers an ensuing discussion of three viable strategic options to derail Tehran's stifling defiance toward abandoning its nuclear weapons program and some consequences toward taking such action.

## Historical Perspective

Historically, Iran has experienced constant internal and external hurdles in seeking out its own identity. Internally, Iran was a country tainted by upheavals to establish political and social reforms. Externally, superpower rivalries such as Russia and Britain competed for control of Iran due to its geography, its geopolitical position, and the absence of real social and political reforms. External influences in Iran's political history are evident throughout history, especially when Iran pursued political reform toward its emergence as modern nation-state.

The earliest phase in Iran's emergence as a modern nation-state is represented in the Qajer era from 1785 to 1925. It is during this time that Iran, known as Persia, transformed from a tribal territory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, into a unified monarch ruling nation-state in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Iran was plagued with conflict between occupying European powers such as Russia and Great Britain. Western impact brought economic hardship against Iran's populace due to internal struggles to take Iran's territory back from European rivals. Massive taxation to pay for the Western conflicts resulted in economic and political hardships upon the Iranian nation. While the Iranian monarchy felt Western powers were exploiting its country, the Iranian reformers felt the need to resist this exploitation by utilizing Western methods to modernize their nation through education, the military, and economy.<sup>3</sup> During the Qajer era, Reza Shah Pahlavi, supported by the Revival Party, embodied nationalist ideas and like Ataturk in Turkey who sought Westernization for his country, Reza's inspiration was to seek a campaign for a Republic. The Republic established was known as the Pahlavi dynasty, which ruled from 1925-1979.

Under the Pahlavi dynasty, Iran became a transitional society where Reza Shah oversaw an aggressive modernization program focusing on its economy, social programs, and political programs. Reza Shah's ambitious plan to Westernize Iran included creating a well-educated and centralized government to carry out his modernized vision. From his vision, a professional middle class and industrial working class emerged.<sup>4</sup>

Iranian modernization sought national unification and a modern armed force to achieve its national objectives.<sup>5</sup> During Reza's modernization period, Iran directed the majority of its budget toward recapitalizing the military. While British influence was actively prevalent in Iranian oil fields, Reza felt national security was vital to the growth of his programs; not wanting a repeat of the Russian and British occupation seen during the Qajar era.<sup>6</sup> While pressing his agenda to Westernize Iranian culture, Reza Shah found opposition among groups in the government and clergy.

Because Reza Shah led his modernization program with a dictatorial style, dissatisfaction among groups in the Iranian government and clergy ensued. While Reza's approach toward Western modernization was improving the state's overall status both internally and externally, negative effects of the hardliner approach were felt throughout Iran's lower class populace. The upper and middle class became accustomed to the virtues of the West and according to the clergy; they neglected their pre-Islamic Iran values.<sup>7</sup> Reza Shah was adamant to remove religion from politics and undermined the influence of the clerics.<sup>8</sup> Reza Shah's dictatorial style and the separation of religion and politics resulted in little support by the end of his reign after

World War II. In turn, his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, assumed the position as the Shah of Iran in 1941.

The new Shah of Iran continued the reform policies of his father; however, he vowed to act as a constitutional monarch who deferred his power to Majles (parliament).<sup>9</sup> Despite the Shah's vow to act as a monarch, he continued to expand his constitutional powers over appointed Prime Ministers, involved himself in all entities of governmental affairs and revived the Iranian army to ensure loyalty to the royal family.<sup>10</sup> In 1951, the Shah, under pressure from the Majles, appointed Mohammad Mossadeq as Prime Minister of Iran. Considered left-leaning by the United States, Mossadeq implemented a policy to nationalize the British owned oil industry in Iran.<sup>11</sup> The Shah feared a Western oil embargo and opposed Mossadeq and his political movements to monopolize Iranian oil; fearing an embargo would drive Iran into economic shambles.<sup>12</sup> A movement to dismiss Mossadeq as Prime Minister resulted in political opposition against the Shah, who eventually sought sanctuary outside of Iran. It was after this movement that America's influence amplified in Iran.

The United States' involvement drastically increased with Iran in 1953 after the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated a coup against democratically elected Mossadeq.<sup>13</sup> Successful in their attempt to reinstate the Shah back into power, the United States revealed America's influence and malevolent ambitions in Iran.<sup>14</sup> The realities of the Cold War with the Soviet Union were reason for the United States to capitalize on the Shah's anti-communist beliefs and enforce its containment policy against the communist threat's spreading. Protecting America's vital interests in the

Middle East required a solid Iranian partnership, which eventually included an overthrow of the Pahlavi Dynasty.

In 1954, the United States emerged as the dominant foreign power in Iran, which supplied the nation-state with a well-defined military and secured a 40% share of Iranian oil.<sup>15</sup> While the Shah established Iran as an indispensable ally of the United States, America brought considerable investment to the Iranian military and civilian sectors.<sup>16</sup> During this time, the Shah focused on reform policies to include voting rights for women, building Iran's infrastructure, education, land reform, and industry.<sup>17</sup> The result was a flourishing middle class and Iran becoming a major economic player both internationally and in the Middle East region.<sup>18</sup> In 1959 the Shah negotiated with the United States for technological advancements to start a nuclear program. The Shah's plan was to build 23 nuclear power reactors by the 1990s and asserted this ambitious program was necessary for the rising domestic energy consumption.<sup>19</sup> The Shah argued a need to preserve their oil and gas production to maintain a strong influx of current and future foreign currency into their economy.<sup>20</sup>

While the Shah continued to modernize Iran and orient it toward Western ideals, opposition grew as he marginalized Iran's Shiite clergy. Accusations increased by the Majles that the Shah continued to violate the Iranian constitution. A major opponent of the Shah was the clerical leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who alleged the Shah was driving a divide between Islamic religion and the state of Iran.<sup>21</sup> The Shah's anti-clerical policies and Khomeini's accusations that the Shah had forfeited Iran's sovereignty to the United States resulted in Khomeini's exile to Iraq and eventually France. Khomeini's exile set the stage for the Iranian revolution, which would

eventually collapse the Shah's reign and government, institutionalize the Islamic Republic, and end America's influence with the nation-state of Iran.

In 1978, Iran was experiencing a civil uprising and the United States failed to see this perfect storm developing over the horizon. The CIA and State Department reported the political situation in Iran was stable, despite the increased volume of civil protest occurring. The agencies noted the Shah would weather the current storm of protest: the Defense Intelligence Agency predicted he would remain in power for the next ten years.<sup>22</sup> No one estimated Iran's regime, being a stable monarchy with billions in oil revenues, supported by the world's most powerful countries, and having the region's largest military could succumb to revolutionaries.<sup>23</sup> Due to the intelligence failure, a coup ensued and the Iranian Pahlavi monarchy collapsed in 1979. The establishment of the new Islamic Republic saw rule under the Supreme Leader Khomeini.

After the revolution, Iran's power in the region declined compared with its Arab neighbors. Iran's military spending fell from \$16.6 billion in 1978 to \$7.7 billion in 1979, and the military found it weak on talent with many officers killed during the revolution.<sup>24</sup> Yet, as Iran's power declined in the Middle Eastern region, the ambitions of the revolutionaries grew.<sup>25</sup> The U.S. predicted Khomeini would distance himself from the Shah's strategic aspirations; however, his revolutionaries embraced the Shah's aspirations and the fundamental principle to become a regional hegemony. Unlike the Shah's strategy that based Iran's position on regional dominance and an alliance with the United States, the new regime based their approach on Iran's integration and reconciliation with its immediate neighbors.<sup>26</sup> The clerics saw it their duty to advance themselves as a regional hegemonic power through geographical expansion and rule

the entire Islamic world; believing it their natural right as Persians.<sup>27</sup> To carry out their agenda in the Middle Eastern region, Iran's quest was to dethrone the Arab Sheikhs (leaders), who were pro-U.S. and establish governments based on Islamic principles.<sup>28</sup> Iran's quest to challenge the status quo of Sheikhs placed it at odds with Iraq, which, backed by the United States, lead a preemptive attack on Iran to protect its sovereignty. In turn, Iran's ambitions were to conquer Iraq to bridge the Persian-Arab divide with political Islam.<sup>29</sup>

The establishment of Iran's Islamic Republic tilted Western balance in the Middle East. In the midst of the Cold War, the United States now lost a viable ally to maintain stability in the Middle East and deter Soviet Union influences in the region. Not only was the revolution in Iran politically devastating for the United States, however, there were ramifications for Israel who had previously maintained positive foreign relations with Iran. Within the strategic framework, Iran's geography, its economic and military ties to Israel, oil, and Iran's traditional enmity with Iraq and the Soviet Union made it irreplaceable to the United States and Israel.<sup>30</sup> Israel and the United States saw its regional strategy in the Middle East deteriorate with Iran after a twenty-five year political investment.<sup>31</sup> As time progressed, tensions mounted between Israel, Iran, and the United States.

In 1953, the American Pro-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a United States lobbyist group, was established. AIPAC's overall charter was to ensure United States-Israel relations remained strong; however, its agenda encompassed other objectives. The group advocated against a United States-Arab arm deals to provide weapons to Arab states, lobbied to soften Washington's stance on opposition to Israeli



settlements in occupied territories, to prevent any peace deal forced on Israel, and pursued a pro-Israeli tilt in U.S. Middle East policy.<sup>32</sup> AIPAC wanted to pursue a new order in the Middle East by initiating a peace process. This new order eliminated the dividing lines of the Middle East, which included an Islam vs. Arab-Persian split, which Iran preferred.<sup>33</sup> This peace initiative implemented by Israel would lead to peace with Syria and Palestine, which would incline the Arab world to favor Israel and further diminish Iran's influence in the region.<sup>34</sup> The result of Israel's initiative to form a new Middle Eastern order resulted in the Islamic Republic undermining the Israeli peace process by influencing fundamentalist Palestinian groups, further exploiting anti-Western sentiment through Hamas and Hezbollah and continuing to subvert the international community by producing nuclear weapons.

### Iranian Agenda

Throughout Iran's three-thousand year history, the state has aspired to be a regional hegemonic power.<sup>35</sup> Iran's clerical leaders believe it is Iran's natural right and duty to dominate the region. Shaped by its political history, Iran has molded its national identity to be overly self-confident by challenging the international community on the development of nuclear weapons. At the same time, Iran identifies itself as a victim. From experiences of past colonial rule, Iran has developed growing suspicions against the United States, Britain, and Israel, which has resulted in a mistrust that has influenced its security posture. Iran does not see itself as a status quo power worried about defense; rather, Tehran seeks to expand its world influence through military means and posture itself as a regional hegemonic power. Hence, the dire importance of the international community to contain and eliminate Iran's nuclear weapons program. Iran's threat toward disrupting the world economy, with regard to blocking the

Strait of Hormuz and influencing the region, makes this rogue nation an international concern. Tehran lacks the principles of freedom and tolerance towards its populace, and has discounted the supremacy of reason over political will.

Iran has formulated its national agenda by focusing on its internal security to maintain the integrity of the Islamic Republic. Iranian security has three focal points: to secure the country against opposition elements along its borders, to confine access of the United States to the Persian Gulf region, and to prevent incursions of religious ethnic insurgents into Iran from neighboring states.<sup>36</sup> Iran's internal political structure has shaped its domestic and foreign policy decision-making, including the most pressing issue of developing nuclear weapons. Consequently, Iran's political history has played a significant role in formulating its response to the United States and its partners toward constraining its nuclear program and uranium enrichment.<sup>37</sup> Tehran is convinced the development of a nuclear weapon allows unconditional influence in the Middle Eastern region and provides an umbrella to ensure Tehran preserves its three focal points toward national security. Nuclear weapons gives Tehran recognized authority and influence within the international community, something it has been trying to achieve since the Islamic Revolution. To feed its regional and domestic ambitions and counter international sanctions, Tehran has implemented an outreach program to formulate alliances in various regions of the world, other than the Middle East.

The state harbors global ambitions in Africa and South America with the strategic aim at undermining United States interest in these regions as well as diminishing Western influence in the Middle East. Iran is using these alliances to undermine sanctions imposed on them by the international community. Iranian President

Ahmadinejad has directed his attention to embolden the anti-American bloc of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Cuba to create an axis against the United States and its international partners. Both Venezuela and Iran have embraced to overcome international isolation and sanctions imposed on them by the United States and its partners.<sup>38</sup> Other Latin American states, to include Cuba, have been encouraged by Iran and Venezuela to embark upon confrontational policies toward the United States.<sup>39</sup> Tehran is using its monetary influence over impoverished Latin American countries to advance its agenda of subverting the United States and opening trade initiatives to further its international and domestic interests. While the United States and its European allies are busy in the Middle East region, Tehran is spreading its influence not only in Latin America, but in Africa as well. The Supreme Leader of Iran recently noted 53 countries as diplomatic easy pickings to increase their span of influence.<sup>40</sup>

Ahmadinejad envisions Africa as the next frontier to advance Tehran's agenda to challenge America's interests and to develop strong alliances with a number of African states. In particular, it has developed strong ties with Senegal; a once Cold War ally of the United States.<sup>41</sup> The Supreme Leader of Iran declared, "developing unity between Islamic countries like Senegal and Iran can weaken 'the great powers': like the United States."<sup>42</sup> Shortly after this comment, Iran and Senegal signed a bilateral defense agreement. Iran has thus strategically positioned itself on the doorsteps of the United States and its European allies by coordinating diplomatic, economic, and military strategies to expand its influence in Africa and Latin America. There is an increasing physical presence of Iranian terrorist groups migrating to these regions, which is a continued concern for policymakers.<sup>43</sup>

Iran's complex political structure is very much a product of the Islamic revolution. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is Iran's most powerful figure and remains the ultimate political authority.<sup>44</sup> His influence extends over contending factions, personal relationships with top military commanders, and the clerical representatives.

Since the presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's in 2005, Khamenei's influence has grown due to Ahmadinejad's radical posturing and his internal unpopularity among more moderate political leaders.<sup>45</sup> President Ahmadinejad has created a point of contention within his government by making statements, such as, "Israel should be wiped off the map," or "the Holocaust of the Jewish people never happened."<sup>46</sup> Ahmadinejad's radical ideology encompasses an apocalyptic war with the U.S. and Israel and shapes policies from his messianic beliefs.<sup>47</sup> He firmly believes the Islamic messiah will come soon to earth and feels that it is his duty to accelerate conditions for the event to occur sooner, rather than later.<sup>48</sup> Moderate leaders in the Majles have noted this type of rhetoric is irresponsible and limits Iran's international and regional credibility when trying to advance its domestic agenda to strengthen Iran's depressed economy and military. However, the majority align themselves with Ahmadinejad's radical ideology; thereby making negotiations difficult to diffuse Iran's agenda toward nuclear weapons procurement.

Khamenei's and Ahmadinejad's strategic confidence, distrust of the United States, and focus on Iranian sovereignty results in an aversion to compromise, which is seen as a sign of weakness and believes it would allow the United States to exert even greater pressure over Iran.<sup>49</sup> Khamenei's worldview includes the premise that Iran

should be politically independent and be able to promote Islam by being self-sufficient both economically and technologically.<sup>50</sup> Hence, Iran's belief that it is their natural right to advance their ever-growing nuclear program, which is in large part due to Iran's military being in shambles.<sup>51</sup>

Khamenei's principles and values require consideration when the United States and international community formulate a policy toward Iran's nuclear program. It is evident that Khamenei will dismiss any outside policy, which will force him to compromise his beliefs publicly in the domestic and international arenas. As international timelines draw to a close with no action being implemented by the international community; Tehran's continues to undermine the United States and international sanctions by implementing outreach programs with Latin America and various African nations. This presents a clear and present danger as Tehran shields itself from outside influence and pursues an aggressive nuclear weapons program. The result is an emboldened Tehran, which envisions its regional influence growing stronger while the United States grows weaker. Some suggest Tehran is using nuclear weapons as an instrument to intimidate its neighbors and transfer this power to other extremist groups or rogue nations.<sup>52</sup> Iran's Supreme Leader and his radical political appointees have become emboldened and increasingly defiant with regard to Iran's uranium enrichment due to policies the United States and international community have taken the past 30 years.

#### President George W. Bush Administration

During the eight years of the Bush administration, United States' foreign policy focused on the containment of Iran and sought to prevent Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons.<sup>53</sup> The policy of the Bush administration was to limit Iran's strategic

capabilities through international diplomacy and sanctions.<sup>54</sup> While President Bush's policy continued to isolate Iran from the international community, numerous sanctions kept Iran internally weak; however, there was no fundamental change in Iranian foreign policy.<sup>55</sup> While not an active participant, indirectly, the Bush administration engaged with Iran through the EU-3, which was comprised of France, Britain, and Germany. Taking a multilateral approach, President Bush offered to join in nuclear talks with Iran through the "Permanent Five Plus 1" or better known as the P5+1.<sup>56</sup> Through these venues, the administration aggressively sought U.S. and U.N. sanctions against Iran. While pursuing these different avenues to deter Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons, President Bush sought to employ policies that were considerate of the Iranian populace's struggle for democracy and freedom, as well as respectful for human rights.

When viewing the strategic environment, President Bush believed the root cause of instability in the Middle East was due to Tehran's aggression to secure nuclear weapons capabilities, promote terrorism in Lebanon and Palestinian, disrupt the United States effort in Iraq and Afghanistan, and secure control over global petroleum markets.<sup>57</sup> President Bush saw it to be a strategic imperative to limit Tehran's aggressive behavior, which he believed a threat, not only to the Middle East region and national interests; however, global security as well. The 2006 National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States spells out Tehran's agenda for sponsoring terrorism, threatening the sovereignty of Israel, thwarting Middle East peace by disrupting democracy in Iraq and denying the aspirations of its people for freedom.<sup>58</sup> The NSS notes Iran needs to make the strategic decision to change its policies toward nuclear weapons, open its political system, and afford freedom to its people.<sup>59</sup> While

President Bush did not openly engage with Tehran, the EU-3's dialogue with Tehran in 2003 provided hope in curbing Iran's aggressive nuclear program.

During the Bush administration, the EU-3 on October 21, 2003 announced Tehran's willingness to accept peaceful nuclear technology (accept uranium enrichment at a non-lethal grade) from the EU-3. In return, Tehran agreed to disclose past nuclear activities, to sign and ratify "Additional Protocol" to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that allowed for enhanced inspections, and suspend its uranium enrichment activities.<sup>60</sup> Shortly after the EU-3 reached a compromise with the Iranian government, Tehran quickly withdrew from the agreement due to the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) statement that Iran had violated the NPT for the past 18 years.<sup>61</sup> The EU-3 returned to the negotiating table with Tehran to ratify the original agreement. The new agreement, known as the "Paris Agreement," stipulated Iran would suspend its uranium enrichment program in exchange for aid and renewed trade talks.<sup>62</sup> The Iranian presidential election of 2005 brought a significant shift in the political mindset of Iran. Newly elected President Ahmadinejad quickly unraveled the "Paris Agreement", stating it did not provide the necessary means for Iran's national security. Shortly thereafter, the IAEA seals were broken at the Esfahan facilities and Iran, with purpose, began uranium conversion (one-step before enrichment).<sup>63</sup> The IAEA, EU-3, and Bush administration stated Iran was non-compliant with NPT and sought further action from the United Nations Security Council.

In 2006, President Bush, working with the United Nations Security Council decided to take a multilateral approach toward Iran. The international community observed a policy shift when President Bush stated his administration would be willing

to open dialogue with Iran if they were willing to suspend uranium enrichment. A newly formed organization of nations was developed. The committee, known as the “Permanent Five Plus 1” (P5+1), was comprised of the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany. Working under the U.N. Security Council, the P5+1 negotiated an annex to U.N. Resolution 1747. Drafted by P5+1, Annex I of U.N. Resolution 1747 offered an incentive package for Iran’s cooperation. The annex incentives included:<sup>64</sup>

Negotiations on an EU-Iran trade agreement and acceptance of Iran into the World Trade Organization.

Easing of U.S. sanctions to permit sales to Iran of commercial aircraft/parts.

Sale to Iran of a light-water nuclear reactor and guarantee of nuclear fuel (including a five year buffer stock of fuel), and possible sales of light-water research reactors for medicine and agriculture applications.

An energy partnership between Iran and the EU, including help for Iran to modernize its oil and gas sector and to build export pipelines.

Support for a regional security forum for the Persian Gulf, and support for the objective of a WMD free zone for the Middle East.

The possibility of eventually allowing Iran to resume uranium enrichment if it complies with all outstanding IAEA requirements.

Iran declined the incentives offered by the P5+1 and continued to defy U.N. Security Council Resolutions. While there has been a wide range of U.N. Security Council Resolutions imposed on Iran, each has targeted Tehran’s nuclear program, banned arms transfer by Iran to various militant groups, and called on nation-states not to export arms or support new business with Iran. Each resolution affirms the need for Iran to take necessary steps required by the IAEA to suspend all uranium enrichment-related activities and allow inspectors into Iran to verify Tehran’s compliance with the NPT. Tehran rejected each U.N. Resolution, citing each illegitimate and maintained its



longstanding position that Iran's nuclear program was for peaceful purposes. Contrary to Tehran's claims to pursue a peaceful nuclear program, Ahmadinejad continued his rhetoric that Israel should be "wiped off this map" and demanded Iran's "rights" to a nuclear program.<sup>65</sup> Tehran continued to defy resolutions imposed by the U.N. A summary of provisions the U.N. Resolutions (1737, 1747, and 1803) on the Iran Nuclear Program presented by the U.N. Security Council includes:<sup>66</sup>

Require Iran to suspend uranium enrichment.

Prohibit transfer to Iran of nuclear, missile, and dual use items to Iran, except for use in light water reactors.

Prohibit Iran from exporting arms or WMD-useful technology.

Freeze the assets of 40 named Iranian persons and entities, including Bank Sepah, and several Iranian front companies.

Require that countries exercise restraint with respect to travel of 35 named Iranians and ban the travel of 5 others.

Calls on states not to export arms to Iran or support new business with Iran.

Calls for vigilance with respect to the foreign activities of all Iranian banks, particularly Bank Melli and Bank Saderat.

Calls on countries to inspect cargoes carried by Iran Air Cargo and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines if there are indications they carry cargo banned for carriage to Iran.

Working with the P5+1 and United Nations Security Council, the Bush administration believed it could curb Iranian nuclear aggression and limit Tehran's efforts to undermine U.S. interest in the Middle East. Toward the end of his time in office, President Bush took a multilateral approach to limit Iran's strategic capabilities through international diplomacy and sanctions outside the Security Council's mandate.<sup>67</sup> The scope of the Bush administration's policy to contain Tehran's ambitions appeared limited in extinguishing the flash point in the Middle East.

## President Barrack H. Obama Administration

Since President Obama took office in January 2009, his administration has adopted a foreign policy of engagement without preconditions with regard to Iran. Sharing the same goals as the Bush administration, President Obama wants to ensure Iran does not undermine United States' interest in the Middle East and has indicated that further sanctions through the U.N. Security Council and multilateral initiatives might be necessary.<sup>68</sup> President Obama wants to contain Tehran's strategic capabilities and influence in the Middle East through open dialogue. Unlike the Bush administration, President Obama has not indicated leveraging military force against Iran if they do not comply with International sanctions; however, his administration has not fully taken this option off the table.<sup>69</sup>

The world saw the re-election of President Ahmadinedah in June 2009, which brought about election-related violence within Iran. While the populace uprising challenged the Iranian regime and continues to do so, many internal and external factions have discounted these uprising as a threat to Iran's Supreme Leader and President Ahmadinejah's governance. President Obama criticized the violence in Iran and agreed with administration officials to capitalize upon the turmoil by trying to bring Iran to the nuclear bargaining table. Working with the international community, the Obama administration set a deadline for Tehran to return to the bargaining table by 24 September 2009.<sup>70</sup> President Obama made it clear that refusing the offer would result in the United States working with its allies to impose additional sanctions. Tehran verbally accepted multilateral negotiations; however, President Ahmadinejah continued his rhetoric and consistently proves defiant against the international community to cease uranium enrichment. The IAEA has revealed that Iran is operating a clandestine

uranium enrichment site in Qom. Tehran's recent defiance gives more credence to Obama's administration efforts to work with its international partners and apply pressure on Tehran.

Working with the international community, the Obama administration is engaging in multilateral negotiations with Iran versus trying to achieve unilateral talks, which some believe would cause Tehran to resist negotiations. Parallel to seeking open dialogue with Tehran, President Obama is currently laying out a strategic plan with Congress and the international community to seek crippling sanctions against Iran if successful talks do not come to fruition. Continuing to work with the P5+1 and U.N. Security Council, the Obama administration sees it to be a strategic imperative to build a broader coalition of partners for sanctions than what the Bush administration previously achieved. A broader coalition would counter any China or Russia initiative to veto harsh economic measures as imposed by the U.N. Security Council. While Russia and China have strong economic ties with Iran, the United States needs to win their support to curb trade, investment, give monetary credits to Iran, and convince their banking structure from doing business with Iran.<sup>71</sup> These additions would compliment U.N. Security Council Resolutions and United States sanctions already established during the Bush administration.

The Obama administration's new policy of engagement without preconditions appears stymied in opening true meaningful dialogue with the rogue state of Iran. Some in the Obama administration have openly suggested a direct approach with Tehran will not persuade the nation to curtail its nuclear ambitions. Due to its hardliner viewpoints, Tehran continues to defy the international community and appears to extend

the olive branch only when international deadlines draw near or when it is advantageous to its national interests to do so.

### Strategic Dilemma

Given the current regional and global situation, President Obama and his administration find itself impotent in derailing Tehran's proliferation of nuclear weapons. While Tehran holds the political "high ground", the United States and international community is held at bay by a defiant nation-state. Faced with a complex environment, President Obama finds itself in a quagmire when applying the tools of the PMESII model. Politically, the administration lacks the ability of dissuasion against Iran, which is the foundation for success; with all that this might entail. Militarily, the capability exist to execute a U.S. led coalition airstrike to disrupt Iran's nuclear producing capabilities, however, the United States military ground forces have reach a culmination point in Iraq and Afghanistan and do not possess the equipment or manpower capacity to expand their ground operation into another area of operation. Economically, the United States is experiencing the worst economic crisis seen in decades. Currently, the United States is applying economic stabilization methods that are being applied toward the world economy; this is a distraction for additional funding in supporting another major operation in the Middle East. Estimates for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan will have cost the American taxpayer approximately \$1.08 trillion by the end of FY 2010 and will continue to grow in the future.<sup>72</sup> The current infrastructure of the military is limited with the growing deficit and aggressive advancement of President Obama's social agenda. This has resulted in limited revenues and discretionary funds being redirected to a military whose equipment infrastructure needs recapitalization due to extended deployments.

The right information must be present to ensure the correct strategic message is synchronized appropriately with national policy. The information campaign not only is for the international scene; however, for the internal Iranian opposition and U.S. populace. Marriage between information operations and strategic communications must be consistent to ensure perceptions are not contradicting the desired effects. Currently, the U.S. faces an information and strategic communication conflict, which distracts from U.S. policy. This disconnect is creating an illegitimacy and lack of credibility to act against Tehran.

Socially, the United States lacks the political and popular will for another full-scale conflict in the Middle East. Not until America's military has concluded its mission in Iraq and Afghanistan and our economy is once again thriving, will the American people have the social will, and Washington, D.C. have the political will, to confront Tehran's aggression with all instruments of national power. These considerations must be taken into account when formulating a correct course of action, in dealing with the ambiguous environment presented by Iran.

### Strategic Options

Iran is an extremely complex and volatile environment that presents many ambiguous challenges for the United States and its allies. Due to Iran being such a difficult problem, there is no one solution to implement and it is unwise to say only one option to resolution is the correct answer, because no particular course of action proves unambiguously better than the rest. There are many courses of action available to the United States. Some of these options need to work simultaneously with each other to achieve maximum effectiveness. For now, the Obama administration has taken the path of engagement toward Iran, and has offered a grace period to Tehran in hopes of

persuading the nation-state to cease its nuclear weapons ambitions. Whether engaging diplomatically with Tehran will work is yet to be determined; however, flexibility in considering other options is required.

The United States must bring to bear all elements of national power on Tehran to exploit its political weakness, in hopes of eliminating Iran's nuclear weapon ambitions. Three options that are at the forefront include: diplomacy with the option of implementing increased international and United States sanctions, a United States led coalition military airstrike with a possible ground invasion, or a status quo acceptance of a nuclear Iran.

The October 2009 meeting in Geneva brought Tehran and the P5+1 to agree to another meeting in the near future to discuss curtailing Iran's nuclear weapon ambitions. Since this meeting, the United States and its international partners have stipulated a new deadline of December 2009 for Tehran to comply with U.N. demands of ceasing aspirations of uranium enrichment for the purpose of nuclear weapons. The time has come and past with the Obama administration succumbing to a new January 2010 deadline. At the Geneva meeting, Iran did temporarily agree with P5+1 demands to allow IAEA inspectors to visit their Qom facility; however, compliance to have materials shipped to Russia in order to provide non-weapons grade uranium and an on-site visit, has yet been seen. The P5+1 requires that Tehran provide a far-reaching transparency, which allows the IAEA access to every nuclear site, documents related to nuclear development, and a list of all scientists currently working with Iran on their nuclear program.<sup>73</sup>

The Obama administration is adamant in its commitment to engage Tehran directly through multilateral venues; however, it has worked with the international community to streamline crippling sanctions upon Tehran if further negotiations do not succeed. While the Obama administration has made significant strides in building a coalition of partners to implement increased sanctions, it must also direct attention to the alliances Tehran is building in Latin America and Africa to help support its strategy of countering international sanctions. The Obama administration must pursue aggressive diplomatic negotiations with China and Russia to solicit both nation-states' assistance in pressuring Tehran to comply with the demands of the international community and the NPT. Without the strategic partnership of Russia and China, increased sanctions will slightly tip the current status quo in Iran's favor as Tehran has continued support from outside sources.

If United States diplomacy fails to achieve support from Russia and China, it likely will be from the strong economic ties these two nation-states have with Iran. Russia is currently funneling various forms of assistance to Iran's technological cooperation on weapons, energy, and nuclear industry.<sup>74</sup> Moscow is clear that its national strategy supports a strong and independent Iran to keep the United States occupied in the Middle East, while Moscow furthers its sphere of influence both internal and external to Russia.<sup>75</sup> Some political analysts postulate Russia's interest includes creating a cartel with Iran to have a natural gas monopoly over Europe. On October 14, 2009, Russia's President Putin openly declared that he would not support sanctions against Iran.

If Russia and China do not assist the international community in helping curb Tehran from pursuing nuclear weapons, the Obama administration is working a plan with allies to supplement increased sanctions by implementing a naval blockade or quarantine against Iran, which many European nations oppose.<sup>76</sup> Tehran would consider this an act of military aggression by the United States and its allies, which could result in Tehran increasing their influence in Iraq and Afghanistan, and undermining United States and coalition efforts in the region. Tehran could also create havoc with the world economy by hampering oil export operations through the Strait of Hormuz, which is a vital strategic sea-lane.

Another option available to the United States is to formulate a consensus for a military airstrike against Iran's nuclear facilities. Many leaders have suggested that if Tehran does not comply diplomatically with the international community, then they must be prepared to take whatever action is necessary to prohibit Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

While the Obama administration has stated the President's preferred course of action is diplomacy with Tehran, leveraging the military option is not fully off the table. Defense Secretary Robert Gates notes sanctions are starting to have an impact on Iran with the unemployment rate hitting 14%.<sup>77</sup> Gates states, "severe sanctions will be more effective than military airstrikes to deal with nuclear matters."<sup>78</sup> Gates notes a military airstrike option would slightly curtail Iran from its nuclear ambitions, stating this is solely a temporary solution by only delaying their pursuit of nuclear weapons. While Secretary Gates notes there is room for diplomatic progress, he states it naïve to rule out the military option, which is an instrument of national power that gives leverage when



pursuing diplomatic efforts. The overarching goal during negotiations is for Tehran to realize having nuclear weapons only diminishes Iranian security as opposed to creating a strengthened position. While the military option is available to the United States and its allies, the Obama administration continues to dissuade Israel from making a unilateral military strike until international negotiations are exhausted. In the interim, the Obama administration has persuaded the Israeli Prime Minister to accept the new December 2009 deadline, in light of Israel's position that it has the right to a preemptive military strike against Iran's nuclear program in order to protect itself from future Iranian aggression. It is yet to be seen what Israel reaction to self preservation toward Iranian aggression as the December 2009 deadline has past.

Military action by the United States and its allies or Israel could set off a chain of events throughout the Islamic world. As previously discussed, a military air strike would only delay the progress of Tehran's nuclear program. The cost and benefit analysis suggests that such an option must be pursued lightly, due to Iran's asymmetric counterstrike capabilities in the region. While some suggest Israel would have difficulty acting unilaterally due to the geographical separation of Israel and Iran and the lack of refueling capabilities for aircraft, Israel still has the ability to act. If Israel does act unilaterally, the strike could implicate the Obama administration and involve the United States in certain military conflict with Iran.

Tehran possesses proxies in various countries, such as South America and Africa, and an influence of power to disrupt the Middle East and global region significantly. If Iran were to experience a military air strike on its facilities, Tehran would have the option of mining the Strait of Hormuz, which as previously mentioned, could

hamper the world economic recovery and escalate the change of events into a full-scale conflict. Tehran could step up the threat to Israel by having proxies, such as Hamas and Hezbollah implement increased military operations. Tehran could considerably erode the United States' position in Iraq and Afghanistan. A military air campaign against Iran would ultimately harden Tehran's position toward procuring nuclear weapons and create an even further divide in future negotiations with the Islamic Republic. To be effective, a military option cannot be limited to an air campaign only.

An international coalition with the political and popular will for a full-scale military invasion is one viable option. Regime change would be the overarching objective of such a full-scale coalition campaign. Some senior political analysts have suggested a military airstrike and international sanctions combined with the populace unrest could be enough to manifest pressures inside Iran to spark a coup. Currently, the greatest vulnerability to Iran's leadership is the basic nature of its relations with its populace. Bringing all options of national power to bear upon Iran, including a military airstrike, could exploit Tehran's political weakness sufficiently to collapse the nation-states leadership as a result of its own internal competitions. When considering any military option, it is important to note the strain the United States military is currently under due to the current conflict with Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result, a full-scale military option is not a viable option at this time.

Lastly, the Obama administration has the option to accept the status quo and allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons. If the administration were to accept Iran with a nuclear weapon, an Israeli response may eventually draw the United States into military conflict with Iran. If, however, Israel did not strike Iran and accepted Tehran having a

nuclear capability, then the potential for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East would exist. Israel would lose its influence as being the only nuclear power in the region, preventing Israel to dictate the parameters of peace and pursuing unilateral peace plans.<sup>79</sup> In addition, “the deterrence and power Tehran would gain by mastering nuclear weapons could compel Washington to cut a deal with Tehran in which Iran would be recognized as a regional power and gain strategic significance in the Middle East at the expense of Israel.”<sup>80</sup>

A nuclear Iran would have consequences for the current Arab-Persian divide, which already exists. Tehran would wield its influence as a nuclear superpower resulting in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) seeking a nuclear program to deter Iran and creating a further gap between these two distinct cultures. The result would likely be a significant nuclear arms race in the Middle East that would further deteriorate regional stability. The GCC and Israel continue to question the irrational behavior Tehran exhibits in the region. There are questions and concerns from the international community regarding whether Iran is responsible enough to have such a weapon. There is concern from the world that Tehran has motives other than providing security for their nation-state. Such motives include Iran supplying its proxies with nuclear weapons to eliminate Israel or giving material to terrorist organizations to strike targets around the world. There is concern from the Arab communities that Iran would increase its influence to become a regional hegemonic power. The Obama administration and international community must divorce themselves from the status quo option due to the many negative consequences a nuclear weapon Iran presents. However, if the Obama administration does not divorce itself from the notion of a nuclear weapon Iran; it must

invest in a robust Theater Ballistic Missile Defense system to counter and deter the Iranian nuclear threat presents to the Middle Eastern region and Europe.

### Conclusion

Tehran's continued defiance toward the international community reflects a broader agenda, which includes becoming a regional hegemonic power and posturing itself as an international player. Many of Iran's initiatives and ideologies result from consequences of its struggles throughout history. Despite international pressure to cease its nuclear ambitions, Tehran's strategy is to create a sphere of influence through its proxies in the Middle East, and to continue presenting an absence of good faith with the international community. Tehran has expanded influence in Latin America and Africa to undermine sanctions imposed upon it by the United Nations and United States. Tehran has sought refuge under the Russia and China umbrella due to the strong economic ties these countries possess with Iran. If the United States and its allies are to succeed in curbing Tehran's nuclear program, they must creatively think through this wicked problem and construct viable diplomatic solutions, which allow Iran's government to maintain public credibility. While Tehran's nuclear ambitions pose a severe concern, it is not the only consideration to take into account when designing a sound foreign policy toward this nation-state.

The Bush administration's foreign policy of containment toward Iran appeared to create a stalemate in circumventing Tehran's ambitions. President Bush believed appeasement only made Iran more aggressive toward obtaining nuclear weapons. The Bush administration was more proactive in pursuing multilateral sanctions toward the end of President Bush's term, as well as turning away from Bush's containment policy and engaging with Tehran in the event they were willing to give up uranium enrichment.

The Bush Administration joined the newly organized P5+1 in hopes of working with the United Nations Security Council to create an incentive package that would influence Tehran to cease its rogue behavior; however, tensions continued to manifest.

The Obama administration has continued the efforts President Bush pursued in dissuading Tehran from nuclear ambitions. President Obama has been willing to open the door toward diplomatic negotiations without preconditions in hopes of humanizing Iran and making them feel part of the international community. Continued stifling defiance by Tehran, however, has placed negotiations on the edge of failure. Working in parallel with Iranian negotiations, President Obama has expanded his coalition of strategic partners to impose crippling sanctions on Iran if they do not comply with international demands. In order for Iran to feel the full effect of sanctions and curb its nuclear program, it is a strategic imperative the Obama administration aggressively engages with Russia and China to gain both countries' support of imposed sanctions. The United States must convince the GCC to aggressively engage in negotiations with Iran and influence Tehran's compliance with the international community demands.

There are many strategic options available for consideration when dealing with Iran. However, the PMESII construct must be taken into consideration when formulating these options and whether the United States instruments of national power can achieve the overall objective of curbing Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Increased sanctions from the international community will bring Tehran to the negotiating table and possibly lead Iran to comply in ceasing nuclear weapon procurement, but only if Russia and China offer their support of such sanctions. If the United States and its allies implement a naval blockade or quarantine in conjunction

with sanctions, Tehran could see this as an act of military aggression and counter. Use of military force through an air campaign would only delay Tehran in securing nuclear weapons. Furthermore, there is the risk Tehran would counter. There are some advocates, who state a military air campaign coupled with crippling sanctions would promote Iran nationalist support toward regime change. Another option is to allow Israel to act unilaterally; however, this action would eventually draw the United States and its allies into conflict to stabilize the region if Tehran decided to retaliate. Accepting the status quo and allowing Iran to possess nuclear weapons exhibits the United States' willingness to accept Iran as a regional hegemonic power, creating an unbalance of power in the region, and an uncertainty of whether a nuclear Iran could be trusted due to Tehran's irrational behavior and ties to extremist and terrorist groups.

It is evident the United States and its allies need to aggressively continue to dissuade and deter Tehran from its nuclear ambitions through a valid National Security Policy and Strategy. The international community and the United States have a responsibility to work with Middle Eastern leaders to return strategic stability to the region. Currently, the United States is following the correct course of action by engaging with Tehran while building a coalition of partners to impose crippling sanctions. While the United States has various forms of power at its disposal to promote its foreign policy, U.S. national interests benefit by employing all instruments of national power simultaneously to promote world order. The United States should never take the threat of force off the table; this tool remains the greatest source of influence the United States has in the international arena. The current administration must weigh

all options and develop a grand strategy that is flexible, takes calculated risks, and accurately measures the volatility and uncertainty Iran provides the world.

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